

Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission
4141 N. 3rd Street (North S. Herrera Way), Phoenix, AZ 85012

July 11, 2013

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners

George Cushing, Chair
Jeff Olson, Vice Chair
Philip Hanson (via teleconference)
Wayne Krula
Ron Perkins
Brett Rustand
David Toliver, Sr.

Absent

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Ted Vogt, ADVS Director
Robert Barnes, Deputy Director
Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director
Lee Sevy, Administrator, ADVS Veterans
Education & Training Approving Agency
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer &
Legislative Liaison
Steve Weintraub, Outreach Coordinator
Sean Price, Homeless Veteran Services Program
Manager
Travis Schulte, Military Family Relief Fund/
Veteran Program Specialist
Katherine Harding, Exec. Asst. to the Director
Judy Smith, Admin. Secretary

Guests

Scott McRoberts, VA Acting Public Affairs Officer
Lonnie Sorrell, Veteran
Craig Heustis, Buckeye Councilman
Brian McAchran, Buckeye Vice Mayor
Kathy Pearce, AZ Heroes to Hometowns
Ed & Pam Barnes, Veteran and spouse
Monica Cabrera, VA Public Affairs Officer,
VA Regional Office
Jesus Rodriguez, Change Manager, VA
Regional Office

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman George Cushing. Mr. Cushing asked if there were any corrections to the June minutes. Scott McRoberts, VA Acting Public Affairs Officer, asked to make a distinction to the discussion of AHCCCS. He stated that AHCCCS was used in a literal sense, as in getting Veterans in the door at medical centers.

Commissioner Toliver referred to page 3, paragraph 3 and asked for clarification of the “pack” team, and should he assume it is a physician’s assistant team? Scott said the word “pack” is incorrect and should read, PACT, Patient Align Care Team, which is the primary care model.

This change will be made to the June minutes. Commissioner Perkins motioned to approve the minutes, as amended. Commissioner Krula seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

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Chairman Cushing introduced new ADVS Director Ted Vogt to the Commission and acknowledged guests.

Report “For Profit” G.I. Bill Accreditation – Chairman Cushing called on Lee Sevy, Administrator, ADVS Veterans Education & Training Approving Agency, who gave a report on “For Profit” G.I. Bill Accreditation.

Mr. Sevy has served nineteen years with ADVS; two years as a Veteran Benefits Counselor and the remainder working with the State Approving Agency.

Mr. Sevy presented a hand out and outline of information pertaining to his review. His first comments were about the G.I. Bill history. The original G.I. Bill was the most important bill Congress passed during that time period. The Post 9/11 G.I. Bill is similar, with some of the same issues.

The Montgomery G.I. Bill that most Veterans are familiar with; issued payments only to the Veteran.

Through the Post 9/11 Bill, payments are made to the educational institutions and the Veteran. Some of the same issues that were encountered through the original G.I. Bill after World War II are being seen in institutions today.

The Veterans Education & Training Approving Agency (VETAA) is part of ADVS and is referred to as the State Approving Agency (SAA) by law. The name was changed to include Veterans Education and Training because many Veterans think of the program as having to do only with education when the department is also involved in the training portion of the G. I. Bill.

The Veterans Education and State Approving Agency is under contract with the U. S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs as the initial approval authority in the state of Arizona to approve any program for Veterans’ benefits. It can be a degree program of any type; on the job training, apprenticeships, or testing for license and certification. Due to that contract, VETAA’s job is black and white. There is a regulation to follow and the department follows it.

Prior to October, 2012, VETAA made supervisory visits to organizations; either schools or training facilities. They reviewed policies and procedures and the quality of an organization. At that time, the contract stated VETAA would make physical audits of the financial payments of Veterans; how they were paid, and the amount they were paid. Audits of documentation by the institutions to the VA were made to be sure payments were done correctly.

At the same time, VETAA lost some of its approval authority. The VA decided all public institutions, non-profit institutions and registered apprenticeships would be in the category of being automatically approved. Once they are approved, VETAA has no oversight on those institutions. There are 530 educational institutions and training facilities in Arizona; VETAA has oversight of 473 institutions that are approved for Veteran benefits. These are listed in the hand out.

All “for-profit” institutions and private institutions have to be licensed through the Arizona agency, the Private Post-Secondary Education Board. Two programs that are currently approved and should be mentioned are the Tucson School of Horseshoe that trains Veterans to be farriers, and in Phoenix, the Robarto-Venn School of Luthiery that teaches the building and repair of guitars.

A past program was the School of Astrology. The regulations say that if a Veteran can be employed, by obtaining training or education, it is VETAA's responsibility to approve that training or education.

The accreditation portion, under the accepted levels of quality, lists what an accrediting body is to do. In the U.S., accrediting bodies are not run by the government; they are run by private organizations. The oversight for those private organizations is the Department of Education. They approve and monitor these organizations and, in the last few years, have been looking at them closely.

Mr. Sevy presented information on accreditation. It is his opinion that accreditation is an atmosphere that generates approval of an institution on certain items of academia. It is not a guarantee that they are perfect.

Mr. Sevy presented a document about the use of the G.I. Bill. Veterans can use this document to figure out how to use their G.I. Bill.

He noted that active military are not trained on the education process; most do not understand the education or training process. They don't know they have an option to get On the Job Training (OJT) to become a police officer or a plumber. Our active duty personnel are not properly training the military about education. After leaving the service, the majority of Veterans don't know what they will do and are pushed into the G.I. Bill.

Commissioner Toliver inquired if there is a correlation between the information provided and the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

Mr. Sevy said the TAP Program is being upgraded. The person at Luke AFB who organizes the TAP Program said the program still contains the same information; they are upgrading how it's presented and when. The military starts the TAP Program the last year of active duty and it is a gradual process.

He said ADVS is barred by the VA for trying to help with the TAP Program. Lee tried to reach out to the VA office that presents the TAP briefing to see if he could work with them in the future; calls were not returned.

Lee is working with Steve Weintraub, ADVS Outreach Coordinator, to see if ADVS can help the VA on the Education side of the TAP Program.

Commissioner Olson said he read in the newspaper that Pima College was in danger of losing its accreditation. Today he learned the University of Phoenix may be losing its accreditation. Thousands of Veterans are at great risk at both colleges for graduating on time, if at all. Should the commission become involved; is there anything it can do to monitor more closely?

Mr. Sevy said an accrediting body came in, found mistakes and now both colleges are correcting those mistakes. There was a rebuttal of the finds of the accrediting agency, however, both colleges have gone back to the accrediting body to say they've corrected mistakes that were found and they anticipate their accreditation will be back in full status.

Commissioner Perkins asked about students on the G.I. Bill who are getting a pilot's license and wanting to go into commercial flying. They are required to pay for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) test, which is not paid for by G.I. Bill.

Mr. Sevy said license and certification for the next FY 14 contract will be SAA's responsibility. It has not been SAA's responsibility in Arizona for the last four years.

These testing processes must be approved through an agency such as ADVS. The state agency headquarters for the organization are where the tests are approved. It is a federal program, not an SAA responsibility. The VA has the responsibility to approve all federal testing and certification tests.

Chairman Cushing inquired that if license and certification are approved, will the G.I. Bill pay for them?

Mr. Sevy said, "Yes, several tests are approved; licensing for educators' tests are approved from \$30 to \$180 and Veterans can be reimbursed for those tests."

Commissioner Olson made a historical point; in the 1960's and early 70's the G.I. Bill would pay for pilots' private training and farmers could go to agricultural extension classes. Both were taken away in '72 and '74.

Mr. Sevy said a big problem in Arizona is flight schools. A normal college degree is \$40 to \$60 thousand dollars, unless it's a flight training program. Then \$50 to \$150 thousand can be added to the cost.

Commissioner Rustand said there are approximately 400 applications being approved in Arizona right now. Is there is a waiting list for approvals?

Mr. Sevy said 8 to 10 applications are in the approval process at present. The approval process takes 2-6 weeks. The application is reviewed to be sure it complies with federal regulations. Once the SAA approves, the documents are sent to the VA for input into their systems so that when payments are made they are connected to the VA system.

Chairman Cushing thanked Mr. Sevy for his information and updates on the G.I. Bill and Accreditation.

Closing of VA Medical Clinic in Buckeye, AZ – Chairman Cushing recognized visitor, Scott McRoberts, Veterans Affairs Acting Public Affairs Officer, and asked for discussion regarding the suspension of the Community-based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Buckeye, AZ.

Scott talked at length at the June meeting about the Buckeye CBOC suspension and was asked to come back to answer questions raised from last month.

Scott reported that market penetration in the Southwest Valley is fairly high at 43%. Buckeye alone is at 30%.

The transportation issue was brought up at the June 20th Town Hall Meeting in Buckeye. Scott said the VA has a van transportation operation running Monday, Wednesday and Friday from Buckeye to the Surprise VA Clinic. Veterans are picked up early in the morning

at an area on I-10 near the Buckeye CBOC. The van makes 2 stops on the way to Surprise, and returns passengers to Buckeye in the afternoons. They try to arrive at the clinic by 7:30 a.m.

Commissioner Krula asked what the response for the transportation has been since it started.

Scott said not a high volume of Veterans are using the van transportation service at this time. Transition is going well, and Veterans are getting to appointments. There have been very few problems at this point and those are being addressed at the clinic.

Chairman Cushing is concerned with the influx of 400 Buckeye Veterans coming to the Surprise clinic. The doctor leaving the Buckeye CBOC is also of concern. Mr. Cushing said two doctors have left messages with the VA concerning the Buckeye CBOC and have been contacted. It is his understanding that nurse practitioners are taking care of some of the patients.

Commissioner Krula inquired if there was adequate publicity about the suspension of the Buckeye CBOC and transportation of Veterans to Surprise? It takes a while for the transition to work.

Scott said it is an uncomfortable choice and the VA had limited options. The VA put themselves out there with transparency and communicated with everyone.

Commissioner Olson asked if the transportation is being provided by the VA or is it part of a DAV transportation system?

Scott said the VA Medical Center furnishes vans; he is not sure if it is a mixture of DAV and VA vans, or if all are VA vans. Scott said they are recruiting van drivers to open up the operation an additional two or three days.

Scott noted that VA Director, Sharon Helman, shared the following options at the Buckeye Town Hall meeting on June 20th:

1. Lease space – Federal lease multi-year process to get a federal lease approved or
2. Contract lease – a contract solicitation

It's a local decision the VA will make when they have all the details and they will make an announcement when lease details are in place. Building space in Buckeye was offered at the meeting, which will be considered.

Chairman Cushing asked what kind of timeline are we talking about; 6 months or longer? Veterans in Buckeye are concerned.

Scott said a timeline is difficult to provide; it is not entirely dependent on the VA. If the VA pursues a lease, it will require an act of congress to get it approved. The federal legislation process is lengthy. There is a contracting process that is not completely decided by the VA. There is a program at the VA that moves requests along and allows them to skip the Strategic Capital Asset Program.

Chairman Cushing noted that he received emails from concerned veterans who attended the Town Hall meeting. The city of Buckeye offered a \$1.00 per year lease for the Buckeye CBOC.

Commissioner Toliver asked, "What is the effective date of the suspension? How can the communication be improved so that Veterans who are impacted can be advised early enough so something can be done to preclude this from happening again? Communication seems to have been lacking in the veteran community."

Scott said the suspension date was effective June 30; the suspension end date has not been determined. He said if the VA had spent the money to advertise that the solicitation was out, there is no guarantee the outcome would have been different. The VA follows mandatory protocols through the Federal Business Opportunities (Fed Opps) website at fbo.gov, for communicating what solicitations are out there. It is an open and fair process; all VA solicitations can be viewed on the Vet Biz Opps website. Anyone wanting to do business with the federal government can go to the website and see what solicitations are there and pursue contracts.

There were two press releases issued; the primary care team and contracting officer representative called medical centers and contacted multiple health care providers in that area.

Commissioner Rustand noted that since it could be a 2-3 year process for a federal lease, when would a decision be made if the VA went with a contract instead of a lease?

Scott said it will be up to the VA. Leadership has made it clear that they will weigh all options and look at details. There is no specific date.

Commissioner Olson's concern is the comfort level that exists when the veteran winter visitors return to Arizona. Will the VA still have the capability to provide transportation for an influx of winter visitors?

Scott said the VA is prepared to handle the influx of winter visitors. They have plenty of equipment, but could use more volunteer drivers. The VA would like to offer Veterans more choices by expanding more routes a day or service five days a week.

Chairman Cushing said if Veterans in the area are aware of the need for drivers, maybe some would volunteer to drive vans.

Commissioner Olson asked Scott to submit a job description to the Commission so they can share it with organizations in their communities in an effort to get qualified van drivers. Scott said he will do so.

Mr. Barnes thanked Scott for attending the meeting on short notice. It's important to note that the suspension is a good thing; it means the VA has a Station I.D. established for a clinic in the Buckeye area. It is a matter of moving forward for a stand alone or contract clinic and hire providers who live in the area. Mr. Barnes said the hospital has job openings that can be accessed through USAJobs.

Mr. Barnes noted he and the ADVS Director attend quarterly meetings with the VA Director. The Buckeye CBOC is always a topic of discussion and ADVS will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates to the commission when received.

Communications – The secretary reported there were no communications received at ADVS since the last meeting.

Agency Announcements and Updates – Chairman Cushing called upon Director Ted Vogt for agency announcements and updates.

Director Vogt said he is honored to be the Director of AZDVS and the message he would like the commission to take back to their Veteran service organizations and communities is that the mission of AZDVS remains strong and focused. The names change but the agency is focused on delivering the absolute best service to all Veterans in Arizona. We are here to keep the faith with all Veterans whether they are from the World War II era, Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, First Gulf War, Iraq or Afghanistan Wars.

Director Vogt thanked the AZDVS team and Mr. Barnes for his leadership during the interim period before his arrival.

Director Vogt noted the following AZDVS activities information the commission can take back to their communities.

ADVS will sponsor a dinner to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the beginning of the Vietnam War, on October 5, 2013 at the Scottsdale Plaza Resort. Arizona is the second state to sign on with the Department of Defense (DOD) as a commemorative partner for this event. ADVS wants to make this a big event throughout the state of Arizona and is seeking city partnerships throughout the state. Director Vogt called on Dave Hampton for more information.

Dave noted that during the last legislative session, Senate Concurrent Resolution SCR 1014 passed overwhelmingly. It made Arizona an official Commemorative Partner of the 50th Anniversary of the beginning of the Vietnam War, an event that is sponsored by the Department of Defense (DOD) in Washington. D.C.

The bill was sponsored by Senator Gail Griffin. Senator Griffin thought it should be a statewide event and sent messages to all communities in Arizona asking them to become official commemorative partners. Dave is working with Senator Griffin in that respect. The county attorney in Lake Havasu City called and expressed interest in becoming a commemorative partner.

Ten cities have officially applied to become official partners. They are: Phoenix, Queen Creek, Dewey, Humboldt, Marana, Kingman, Prescott, Surprise, Glendale and Tucson. Dave is receiving inquiries from other towns and communities who are interested in hosting an event. The idea is for these communities to host two events a year and, under the ADVS Veterans Donation Fund statute, they can apply for financial assistance to host these events.

If each community holds two events each year to honor Arizona Vietnam Veterans, they can reach those Veterans in many cities who cannot come to Phoenix and pay \$45 for a dinner. It is Senator Griffin's plan to reach out and assist these veterans and for these events to be

held in their communities. During the meeting, Dave received a text from the City of El Mirage who accepted the offer to become a commemorative partner, making the number of participating cities eleven.

Director Vogt introduced Steve Weintraub, ADVS Outreach Coordinator, and referred to the TAP Program Lee Sevy had talked about. He noted that Steve has met with military installation personnel and that ADVS was invited into Yuma's TAP Program, which the Marine Corps. renamed the Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS).

Steve said he has contacted base commanders at Yuma, Luke and Davis Monthan Air Force Bases regarding the TAP Program. Fort Huachuca in Sierra Vista will be visited next. Access to the base commanders is allowing Steve access to the TAP classes and he is getting ADVS Veteran Benefit Counselors back into the program by providing the resources to educate Veterans on the TAP Program so the veteran counselors can be ahead of veterans transitioning out of the service.

He has gained access to career and educational centers on the military bases and is providing them information and resources for transitioning veterans. Sometimes the transition counselors and coordinators don't have all the information or resources they need, so Steve is getting word out to the bases. This is giving them the transition tools they need and the knowledge of benefits the state has to offer veterans, including education benefits.

Steve has built a good rapport with base commanders and resource people within the unit levels that are interacting with service members and is open to going there and presenting information in an open forum.

Steve is working with the Yuma City Mayor, Al Krieger, and HR Director to aid them in accessing the human resource pool at the Yuma Air Station. Yuma wants to add to the economy and build its infrastructure by retaining military personnel who are transitioning out of the military by taking advantage of their experience and skills for the jobs the city has available.

Steve was able to connect the Yuma HR Director with people on the base so they can retain outgoing service members and keep them in the city to add to the economy. ADVS is another resource.

Ron Perkins asked if there was a benefit in touching base with the National Guard or the Reserves.

Steve said he absolutely intends to meet with the commanders of the National Guard Fighter Wing in Tucson and Refueling Wing at the Air National Guard in Phoenix. He works with the Army National Guard at Papago to provide resource and outreach services.

Chairman Cushing said many Veterans coming out of the military don't know what resources are available to them. These resources ADVS provides will help them make reasonably good decisions when coming out of the military.

Commissioner Toliver noted that in talking with Veterans who are transitioning out of the service and want to go to college, there is a lot of emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM). It appears to be the trend or demand, but they need to know

what the job demands are before getting a degree. If they get a degree and then can't get a job; their time and money have been wasted.

Steve agreed; the degree is no good if there is no demand for it.

Steve has been working with 10 community colleges within the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) and Luke AFB in proposing forums where veterans and their spouses can meet at schools to find what education programs are available.

Director Vogt introduced Sean Price, ADVS Homeless Veteran Services Program Manager, who reported the Veterans Affairs' announcement of more than \$300 million in new grants for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) that were awarded across the United States.

This is the Federal VA's Prevention and Rapid Housing grant for Veterans. This is the 3rd year the grant has been issued in the U.S. The first year, Phoenix and Tucson received \$1.6 to \$1.7 million. In year two, five counties in southern Arizona received a \$1.1 million grant through the Arizona Southern Red Cross.

The grant serves Veteran families. In the first two years, 660 families were served through grants at roughly \$2.8 million. Today, the State of Arizona was awarded three additional grants in addition to the \$3.3 million in grants already in place, which gives the state \$6.2 million support in Veteran family grants for the state of Arizona.

Two of the three grants received today were for rural communities; Coconino and Yavapai Counties and Yuma and Pinal Counties received grants, a huge win for those communities.

The UMOM New Day Center, a partner with ADVS, through a grant in the first year, was to serve 120 people. It served 160 families, close to 400 people, including children and spouses. This grant ended or prevented veteran homelessness among women and families across metro-Phoenix. A one million dollar grant awarded to Maricopa County was directed to single men and women. Previous grants were directed toward families. This grant will serve 400 single adult men and women in Maricopa County.

There has been no rapid re-housing prevention dollars for single adult homeless veterans. There is transitional housing and permanent housing for that population, but this is a huge win for homeless veterans. With this grant, there is a potential for Maricopa County be at functional zero veteran homelessness, which means enough services are in place in Maricopa County to prevent and end veteran homelessness on a day to day basis.

Commissioner Perkins inquired if any of the funding goes to the MANA House for the new women veteran housing that was opened earlier this year?

Sean said MANA House is not included in the grant; Cass Vets and US Vets at Victory Place, an establishment for homeless veterans, were included in the grant.

Mr. Barnes said the MANA House received a grant 2 years ago and they are on a rotating grant per diem to receive future grants.

Sean said the partnerships ADVS has created among the veteran programs, allows all programs to work together as one. An example is; U.S. Vets had a homeless veteran re-integration program grant and they were actually helping the veterans in MANA House through a U.S. Vets grant. ADVS has been working to be sure all veteran programs in Arizona are working together as one.

Sean said, in the past, veterans were jumping from one program to another and that has been stopped. By all the entities working together, each knows what programs the others are working on. The programs will definitely benefit women veterans.

While Sean was in Washington D.C. last month, he met the Secretary of HUD, Shaun Donovan. Mr. Donovan announced that Phoenix and Salt Lake City are the two cities that are on track to end veteran homelessness. The next day, when Secretary Donovan was in Phoenix, the agency and veteran programs got good press and attention.

HUD Vash Vouchers received another allotment across the state. The partnerships with veteran organizations, the three health care systems, grant writing and all that ADVS has been doing is now coming to fruition; they are putting money into success.

The Federal VA is looking at who is being successful; who is doing the right things and they will direct funding to those programs.

ADVS started by writing the homeless plan for the state of Arizona and making it so that all veteran programs in the state are working together in the plan. The ADVS Homeless Veteran plan is recognized nationally; we are striving for coordination to make the plan successful.

Commissioner Krula commended Sean and the agency for their good work in securing a grant for homeless veteran programs and inquired if there are restrictions or if there is flexibility in applying the grant.

Sean said the SSVF grant is a central office grant, not a medical center grant that comes out of Washington, D.C. The criteria are that the veteran must have served one day of active duty and received other than a dishonorable discharge.

The SSVF grant can serve a larger population of veterans the medical centers serve. Transitional housing programs are medical center grants, so the majority of programs will not serve humanitarians, which are non-medically eligible veterans. This grant is open and serves almost 100% of the veteran population.

The flexibility of the oversight criteria to utilize the SSVF grant has made it successful. Primavera and UMOM served 25% more applicants than their grant application request, which means they spent the money wisely and had more flexibility in how their dollars were spent to help veterans.

Chairman Cushing commended Sean and the agency and other program services for the successful management of the homeless program. Those efforts are certainly being recognized. There is one mission and all are working together for those veterans who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. Those working the programs are going about it the right way and it is working well.

Mr. Cushing said it is troubling that any veteran in the state of Arizona finds themselves on the streets. They served their country and should not be put in the position of being homeless. The agency and their partnerships are doing all they can to be sure veterans do not find themselves in those positions.

Chairman Cushing asked Mr. Barnes for an update on the occupancy of the Tucson Veteran Home.

Mr. Barnes said there are about 73 residents, with five to be admitted this week. Two are re-admits and three are new residents. Two buildings are filled. The third building, the Alzheimer's unit has 16 residents. The Veteran Home staff is at capacity.

Next week will mark the VA Annual Survey at the Tucson Veteran Home.

Chairman Cushing noted there were more applications than available rooms when the home opened and questioned why the home is not full.

Mr. Barnes said the home is still working from the initial waiting list for admitting Veterans into the home. Some on list foresee a need in the future but are not ready for long term care at this time. Two residents from the list who were at another facility came to the Tucson Veteran Home.

Mr. Barnes reported on the two cemetery projects; ADVS is ready to move on the Flagstaff project, and is at the point of accepting construction bids. ADVS has asked the Federal VA to defer the grant until next fiscal year, October 1st, when ADVS expects to have the land deed.

ADVS has talked to the Corps. Of Engineers who will present the deed to the Secretary of the Army for signing. ADVS should receive the land deed by August, after which, ADVS will be on the VA priority list when money comes available from the federal government on October 1st. ADVS will move forward on the project at that time.

Chairman Cushing inquired if the forestry service matter has been resolved. Mr. Barnes said the matter is resolved with an understanding of the U.S. Forestry, the Department of the Army and Department of Defense that the land is being used for military purposes and we don't see a problem moving forward.

The Marana Cemetery project is on the VA priority list for funding. ADVS has the property deed and we hope to move it to priority one for funding.

ADVS has done an environmental impact study and was asked by the State Cultural Society to do an archeological/cultural survey, which has been contracted out for completion. Director Vogt said Travis Schulte has assumed the Marana project after Homer Rodgers' retirement. There was some concern in the Tucson area after Homer's retirement that the project might be stalled; the project will continue under Travis' supervision.

Commissioner Perkins referred to discussion at the June meeting about funding for improvements at the Phoenix Veteran Home and the status of that funding.

Mr. Barnes said there is VA conditional grant funding of \$1.2 million for a new building entry and Nurse Call System. ADVS expects to receive the funding for these improvements by October 1.

Chairman Cushing referred to Mike Klier for an update on the Veterans Service Division. Mike reported that the division is doing well. The transformation from paper to digital claims is ongoing and veteran counselors are working on those with the VA.

Vice Chair Olson asked if the VA Regional Office had released any results of the projected completion of two year old claims that were to have been completed by June 19.

Mike said Kevin Secor, the Washington D.C. VA Communicator, sent a letter indicating the two year and older claims have been completed. The VA is now working on one year and older claims with no completion date to report.

Mike said claims are being rated based on evidence to rate the claim, or to continue the claim if the VBC sees an eligibility they can continue working toward for the veteran.

Commissioner Perkins inquired about an update of activities of Veterans Services Officers (VSO's) so the Advisory Commission can attend these events.

Mike Klier said he will look at making the calendar of events available via e-mail through the veteran counselors and get the list out to the commissioners.

Introduction and Welcome to Invited guests – Chairman Cushing recognized Veteran Ed Barnes and his wife Pam, from Sun City West, AZ. Ed is a U.S. Army retiree; today is his first visit to the Advisory Commission meeting, but he plans to be at future meetings.

Ed had two points of discussion:

1. 100% disabled Veterans receive a letter from the VA stating they are 90% disabled with a 10% unemployability rating. Veterans can take this letter to the Arizona Motor Vehicles Division and get a registration fee waiver on license tags for one car that the veteran owns if he or she is 100% disabled and collecting compensation based on that.
2. If a Veteran takes the same letter to the Arizona Game & Fish Department for a discounted fishing license fee, it does not allow any benefits to the disabled veteran due to the unemployability rating.

Ed Barnes would like the Advisory Commission to address this matter with Game & Fish and get the unemployability portion waived so veterans can get fishing licenses. Most veterans he knows who are 100% disabled enjoy fishing more than hunting and he would like to see this rule changed.

Mike Klier said hunting and fishing licenses, along with state park passes, are only allowed for 100% total and permanently disabled veterans. An unemployability rating is not eligible for game and fish or state parks.

Mike is working with the Game & Fish Department to get this changed and intends to get the matter resolved as soon as possible. Mr. Cushing said this subject was also brought up in Town Hall meetings.

Pam Barnes, wife of Ed Barnes from Sun City West asked for information on the 50th Anniversary Vietnam Commemorative event. She and her husband want to become involved and get Sun City West involved. Dave Hampton presented his business card and said to contact him and he will set them up.

Chairman Cushing recognized Kathy Pearce, Founder of Arizona Heroes to Hometowns, an organization that works with injured and wounded post 9/11 veterans. Kathy had no comments.

Craig Heustis, Council member from the Town of Buckeye, and Marine Corps. Veteran who served in Vietnam, is concerned about the CBOC suspension and has heard many discussions. He is in favor of a clinic and said time is not on veterans' side. He gave some statistics, one being that within 15 minutes of I-10 and Broadway, 225,000 people reside in the area.

Within 30 minutes of Buckeye, there are 1.2 million people, and between Verado and I-10, within 15 minutes of Buckeye, there are a quarter of a million people; many are veterans. Many more veterans are coming off deployment; some are expected to reside in or near Buckeye and they will need medical facilities.

These statistics were published a year ago by the county director. He is certain the VA is not looking at these numbers.

Buckeye is in a key location. He asked Scott McRoberts if there is another clinic between Buckeye and California besides Lake Havasu.

Scott said there is not another clinic except Yuma which is not under the Phoenix Healthcare System; it is under the Southern Health Care System.

Mr. Heustis said someone needs to look at the mayor's proposal of \$1.00 a year to rent space in Buckeye. New areas of property in Buckeye were purchased and the town is willing to work with someone to build on this land.

Brian McAchran, Vice Mayor of Buckeye and a Marine Corps. Veteran said Buckeye wants to keep its relationship with the VA strong and will work to continue serving Veterans through a health clinic.

Brian said Buckeye is the ninth fastest growing community in the U.S. In 2000, the population was 5,000; today it is 60,000. The number is expected to grow in the next few years. Economists are saying 800,000 people are expected to move to the greater Phoenix area between now and the year 2020; many of those are moving west of the White Tanks, in the western corridor, which is Buckeye.

Although Buckeye was being served with a clinic, it was almost underserved and instead of just replacing the service they had, Brian would like to try and get more veteran services to the ever growing community.

Additionally, between Buckeye and Yuma there are many unincorporated parts of Maricopa County with many veterans from the Vietnam era living there who have to travel great distances for medical care.

Surprise does a great job in serving Veterans, but it makes a travel burden for our veterans. There is a huge veteran population with new veterans coming back from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. We want to make sure veterans get the benefits for which they are entitled.

Mr. McAchran said he admires what the ADVS does for Veterans and may visit future meetings to listen to the conversations.

Chairman Cushing called on Monica Cabrera, VA Public Affairs Officer, who presented a VA news release regarding the completion of the two year and older claims. She said 2,822 claims were completed in Arizona and Veterans are receiving benefits. They are now working on one year and older claims.

Most of the claims were for additional benefits; the Veteran was already receiving benefits and is now receiving additional benefits.

Overall in the nation, 65,000 two year old claims were completed and all were done within two months.

In response to Lee Sevy's portion of the meeting, Monica said if ADVS would like a briefing on Education benefits, VA representative, Suzie Swafford can be contacted to give a briefing.

Monica said the VA sees hundreds of National Guard Veterans and she has contact information for military installations and the National Guard that she would like to share with Steve Weintraub.

Monica introduced Jesus Rodriguez, Benefits Change Manager, of the VA Regional Office. Jesus said there are many changes coming and he would like to work as a team with ADVS toward these changes. He understands the frustrations; he used to be a claims rater. The VA is trying to correct errors with the Benefits Veterans Management System (BVMS) program and the changes that come with it. It is a huge initiative in going to paperless claims, but it will make the process faster; one of his duties is to help transform to the new system.

Jesus and Monica have been fortunate to make TAP Program presentations to the Army, Air Force and National Guard and are willing to help ADVS with Education and the TAP Program. Mr. Rodriguez wants to work with ADVS as a team and help with the TAP Program and Education with the Air National Guard.

Outreach Activities for the Commission – Chairman Cushing asked if there were any outreach activities to report.

Jeff Olson reported that the Tucson Medical Center and Green Valley Clinic are not receiving information about the Women's Conference. He is continuing to stay in touch with them.

Robert Barnes said Jonathan Gardner, Director of the Tucson Medical Center assigned a person from his staff for the Women's Conference. Donna Jacobs is the contact person for the Prescott VA Hospital and he expects to hear from her.

Mr. Barnes spoke with Sharon Helman of the VA Hospital who has been a supportive partner and asked if she could contact the VISN-18 Directors. We are getting some responses of support for the Women's Conference.

Commissioner Olson asked for contact information for these people that Mr. Barnes will provide.

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order – Chairman Cushing said according to the Advisory Commission Statute, it is time to elect a new Chairman and Vice Chair and opened the floor for nominations. Commissioner Hanson nominated Jeff Olson for Chairman. There were no other nominations.

All were in favor of Jeff Olson as the new Chairman.

Chairman Cushing opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chair. Commissioner Hanson nominated Ron Perkins for Vice Chair. There were no other nominations. All were in favor of Ron Perkins as the new Vice Chair.

Chairman Cushing presented an engraved gavel to new Chairman, Jeff Olson as a symbol of his authority and asked him to use it wisely, justly and with prudence.

New Chairman Olson thanked the commission for their trust, faith and votes in making him Chair of the Advisory Commission. Jeff has 37 years invested in Veteran service and hopes for many more. He promised a few different things in the next year that will be talked about at the next meeting.

He plans to strengthen the bond with the sitting governor and get involved in understanding the governor's policies and what Veterans are doing around the U.S. He asked the commissioners to stay with the commission as it moves forward.

Mr. Cushing thanked each of the commissioners for their support and for staying with the commission. There were difficulties this year and we lost two members. He was chastised by fellow veterans for action, or what some felt was lack of action, regarding the former director's resignation. As a commission, the matter was handled professionally. Mr. Cushing wants the commissioners to know he appreciates their support.

Mr. Cushing said his 6 years of tenure with the commission will end in June, 2014, when he will leave the commission.

Jeff Olson said it is appropriate to give the past Chairman a round of applause for his work on the commission; Mr. Cushing received a rousing applause.

Commissioner Hanson congratulated Director Vogt on his appointment as Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services. He and Commissioner Cushing had the opportunity to spend time with Director Vogt and are very impressed with his background and knowledge of issues and look forward to working with him in the future.

Chairman Cushing thanked the guests; the commission always appreciates their coming to meetings. As their advocates in the State of Arizona, it is the Advisory Commission's responsibility to address their issues and questions. Many people don't know there is a Veterans Service Advisory Commission that serves on behalf of the ADVS Director and the Governor.

Commissioner Ron Perkins noted that ADVS has been working with all the universities in setting up Veteran Centers, which has been outstanding. Ron attended a board meeting of the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame Society (AVHOFs) and said there was an issue with the Director at the Arizona State University Veterans Center.

He has talked to NAU and U of A and tried to get the two together to compare notes in an effort to improve each other's operations. He is meeting resistance in getting one of those universities to take the lead to set that up. A suggestion was made at the meeting that possibly ADVS could take the lead and coordinate the universities so they can get together.

Ron will talk more in detail with Mr. Borden, but would like the subject placed on The August agenda.

Steve Weintraub said he has been in contact with the directors of the veteran programs at ASU and has worked closely with Captain Borden. This is something ADVS will do.

Steve said the Student Veterans of America (SVA) National Conference will be held January 2-5, 2014, in Scottsdale. Prior to that, ADVS plans to get the three universities and chapter leaderships from community colleges together for a mini-conference before the national conference. Steve has been in contact with the SVA national director and ADVS will be allowed time to present at the national conference.

Steve's intent on the national forum is to present some of the programs ADVS is doing and share best practices, to include the veteran support campus program. That is something they are interested in and the director of the Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) is interested, so it is getting national attention. ADVS is serious about getting together and collaborating.

Chairman Cushing called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Olson. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Perkins. The meeting adjourned at 11:49 a.m. The next Advisory Commission meeting will be held August 8, 2013.